

ARTICLE APPEARED
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Assassination Attempt—There is more to the account, published recently in this space, of an assassination plot against Panama's military dictator, Gen. Omar Torrijos. The new details are locked in the secret files of the Drug Enforcement Administration.

A classified memo addressed to John Bartels, then the drug enforcement chief, states simply: "An assassination attempt was uncovered against Gen. Torrijos on July 22, 1974, in Panama." The document explains that details of the plot were picked up "through unofficial CIA channels."

The gun-toting Panamanian leader may have been saved by the DEA intelligence tip, which was quietly passed along to Panamanian authorities. They arrested the suspected assassin and extracted a confession from him. He confirmed that he had plotted to kill Torrijos, hoping to throw Panama into chaos, the confidential report reveals.

Another document raises the possibility that DEA agents were involved in an assassination plot in Panama. This controversial report was submitted by Michael DeFeo, head of a three-man Justice Department team assigned to investigate DEA alleged misconduct.

The suppressed DeFeo report—which raised a series of charges and countercharges between Congress and the Justice Department—relates a vague discussion between two DEA officials, who allegedly proposed that Torrijos' chief assistant be assassinated

because of his drug dealing.

The DEA brass emphatically deny that their people hatched any such plot. They admit, however, that a top Nixon administration drug official had received various options from subordinates on what to do about the Torrijos aide. The options included eliminating him by assassination, although the DEA bosses insist this was never given serious consideration.

DEA's current chief, Peter Bensinger, assured me there has been substantial house-cleaning at the agency in response to the DeFeo report allegations. He also insisted that the study was available to proper officials.

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